

WEIRD!

FANTASTIC!

ASTOUNDING!

BATFLING

JAN. 10c



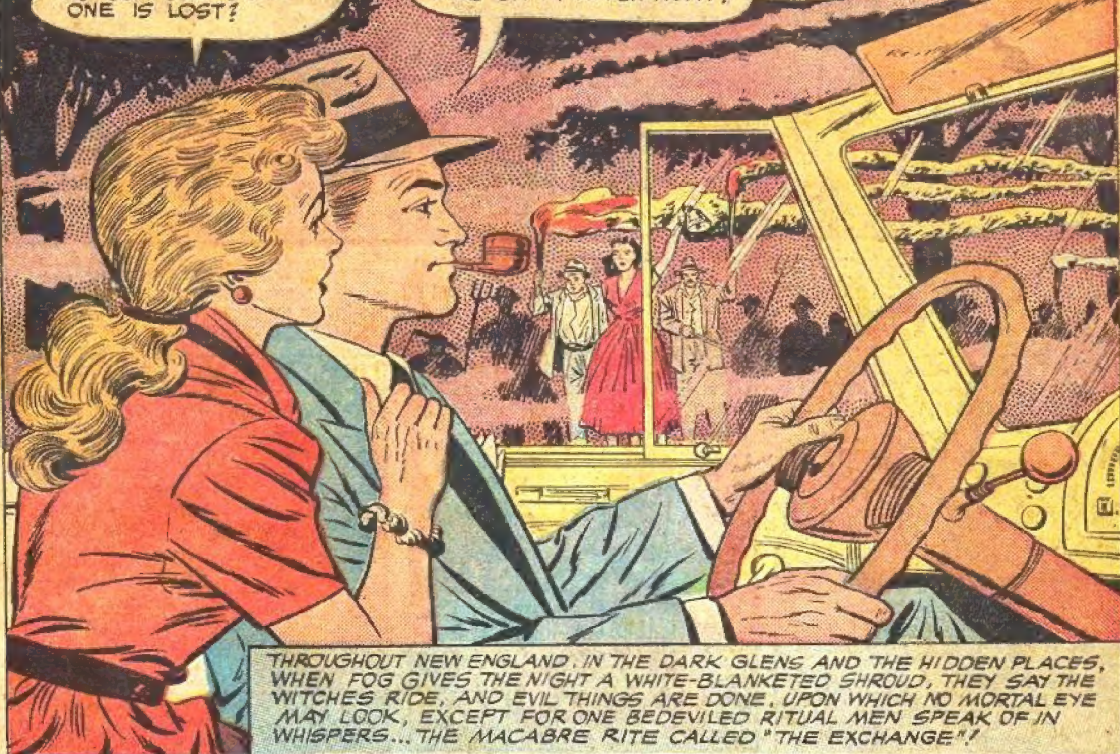
MYSTERIES



MACABRE RITUAL *in* WITCHES' GLEN

LOOK THERE, TOM! WHAT ARE THOSE PEOPLE DOING? WHY ARE THEY OUT IN THE FOG AND CARRYING TORCHES? DO YOU SUPPOSE SOMEONE IS LOST?

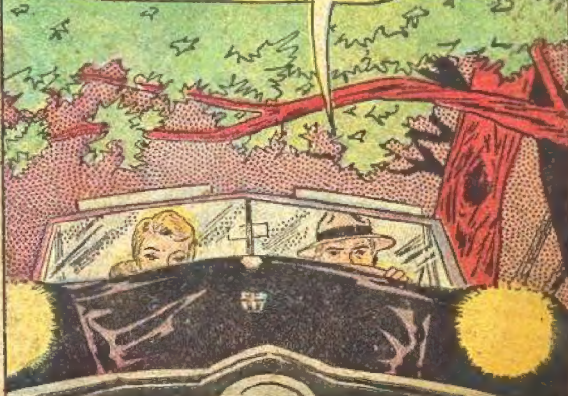
I HAVE AN IDEA WHAT THEY'RE UP TO, VICKI! BUT, OF COURSE, NOT COMING FROM THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY, YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT! THEY ARE ON A WITCH HUNT!



THROUGHOUT NEW ENGLAND, IN THE DARK GLENS AND THE HIDDEN PLACES, WHEN FOG GIVES THE NIGHT A WHITE-BLANKETED SHROUD, THEY SAY THE WITCHES RIDE, AND EVIL THINGS ARE DONE, UPON WHICH NO MORTAL EYE MAY LOOK, EXCEPT FOR ONE BEDEVILED RITUAL MEN SPEAK OF IN WHISPERS... THE MACABRE RITE CALLED "THE EXCHANGE".

TOM! YOU'RE JOKING! SURELY PEOPLE DON'T GO IN FOR THAT KIND OF HOKUM! WITCH HUNTS! WHY, EVERYONE KNOWS THAT WITCHES ARE THE PRODUCTS OF IGNORANCE AND SUPERSTITION, AND DON'T REALLY EXIST!

VICKI, YOU'RE MY GIRL! I LOVE YOU! AND SOON WE'LL BE MARRIED! BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS ABOUT WHICH YOU KNOW NOTHING! I COME FROM THIS COUNTRY! I KNOW THESE WOODS... I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANY, BUT I BELIEVE THERE ARE WITCHES!





WHAT DO THEY WANT? WHY IS SHE STOPPING US?

THAT'S THE CUSTOM WHEN A WITCH HUNT IS ON! THEY WARN ALL TRAVELERS! SHE'LL BE COMING TO THE CAR IN A MOMENT!



TRAVELER! TURN BACK! FOR YONDER THERE IS EVIL! ACROSS THE STREAM, WHERE THE COVERED BRIDGE CROSSES, IS THE WITCHES' GLEN! WE FEAR THAT THEY WILL HOLD A CONCLAVE TONIGHT!

WE HAVE TO GET THROUGH... I'M SORRY. WE CAN'T TURN BACK!

THEN GUARD YOUR LOVED ONE WELL! FOR THIS IS THE NIGHT A WITCH WILL SEEK HUMAN FORM! SHE WILL IMPLANT HER SOUL IN THE BODY OF A BEAUTIFUL GIRL! THAT IS WHY WE ARE HUNTING THEM TONIGHT! GUARD HER WELL!

I WILL... AND I WISH YOU LUCK AND GOOD FORTUNE IN YOUR HUNTING!

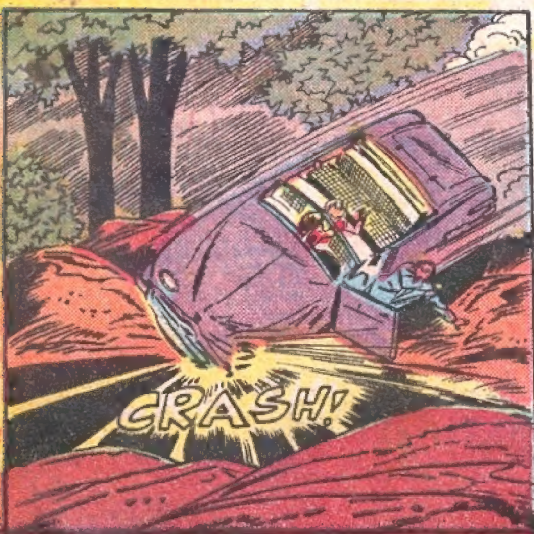
THAT GIRL MUST BE INSANE! TALKING ALL THAT NONSENSE ABOUT WITCHES!

I CAN'T MAKE YOU FEEL ANY DIFFERENT ABOUT IT, VICKI! BUT I'LL BE MIGHTY GLAD TO GET OUT OF HERE, PAST WITCHES' GLEN, AND ON THE STATE HIGHWAY!

AS THEY REACHED THE WITCHES' GLEN, TOM SUDDENLY YUGGED AT THE WHEEL, A FRIGHTENED EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE...

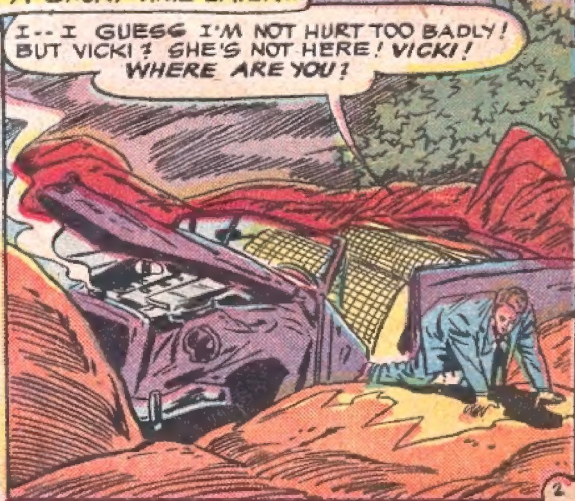
TOM! WHAT'S WRONG?

I-- I DON'T KNOW! THE WHEEL LOCKED! I CAN'T CONTROL THE CAR! WE'RE GOING TO CRASH!



A SHORT TIME LATER...

I-- I GUESS I'M NOT HURT TOO BADLY! BUT VICKI? SHE'S NOT HERE! VICKI! WHERE ARE YOU?



FRANTICALLY, TOM SEARCHED FOR HIS FIANCEE, SHOUTING HER NAME, ONLY TO HAVE THE ECHO MOCK HIM, UNTIL, SUDDENLY, DEEP IN THE WOODED GLEN, HE SAW THE FLICKERING LIGHT OF A CAMPFIRE...

HEEDLESS OF THE WHIPPING BRANCHES, OR THE WIND MOANING THROUGH THE TREES, TOM RACED ALONG THE TRAIL, UNTIL...

THERE MUST BE SOMEONE BY THE FIRE! MAYBE THEY'VE SEEN VICKI! MAYBE I CAN GET HELP!

VICKI!

BUT, AS TOM MADE A MOVE TOWARD VICKI'S UNCONSCIOUS FORM, THE NIGHT WAS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH THE HIDEOUS CACKLING OF FOUL LAUGHTER, AND BEFORE HIS HORRIFIED EYES, A CONCLAVE OF WITCHES GATHERED!

WHEE!
WHEEE!

DANCE, EVIL SISTERS, DANCE! FOR HERE IS THE ONE TO MAKE OUR SISTER YOUNG! ETERNALLY YOUNG!

SHE IS MINE! SOON I WILL SHED THIS TIRED BODY, AND PUT MY SOUL IN HERS! THEN I WILL BE YOUNG AND STRONG! SO DANCE, SISTERS, DANCE! FOR THIS IS THE NIGHT OF THE EXCHANGE!

TOM WATCHED WITH MOUNTING HORROR AS THE EVIL RITUAL GREW WILDER AND WILDER, AND THE MACABRE CEREMONY REACHED ITS BLOOD-CURDLING CLIMAX...

NOW, SISTERS! NOW! PLACE HER BODY ON THE DAIS SO MY BLADE CAN PIERCE HER HEART, DESTROY HER SOUL, AND MAKE HER READY FOR THE EXCHANGE!

WE PREPARE THE CAULDRON... WITH THE BREW OF LIFE FOR YOU, IT SHALL BE LIFE! BUT FOR HER-- DEATH!

IN THE GLEAM OF THE FIRELIGHT, THE CRUEL BLADE GLINTED. AS THE WITCH CLUTCHED IT IN HER BONY HAND AND PREPARED TO MAKE THE DOWNWARD PLUNGE OF THE KNIFE THAT WOULD FOREVER TAKE VICKI FROM TOM! AND AT THIS MOMENT, TOM LEAPED FORWARD...

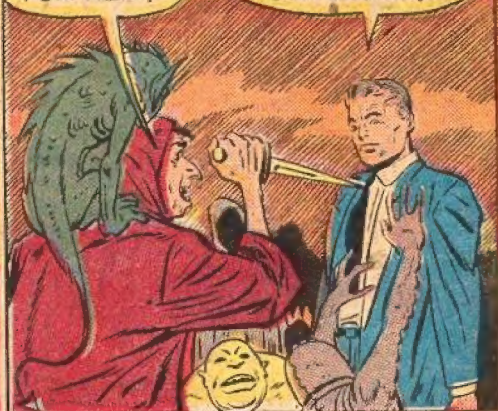
NO! STOP! STOP! DON'T KILL HER! I'LL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE HER LIFE! ANYTHING!

HEEE! HEEE! AT LAST HIS LOVE FOR HER OVERCAME HIS FEAR! THERE IS ONE WAY YOU CAN SAVE HER! ONLY ONE WAY!



SO YOU WISH TO SAVE HER, EH? AND YOU WOULD MAKE ANY SACRIFICE FOR HER?

YES! IF YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME WITH THAT KNIFE, GO AHEAD! AS LONG AS VICKI LIVES, AND IS UNHARMED!



IT WAS NOT ACCIDENT THAT BROUGHT YOU BOTH HERE, YOU KNOW! THROUGH MY BLACK MAGIC, I ORDERED THE CRASH OF YOUR CAR! BECAUSE I WANTED THE BOTH OF YOU!

YOU CAUSED THIS! YOU FOUL, UGLY HAG! IF I COULD GET MY HANDS ON YOU!

IT WOULD DO YOU NO GOOD! BESIDES, YOU CANNOT STRUGGLE WITH MY SISTERS. THEY HAVE THE STRENGTH OF EVIL! NOW, DO YOU WISH TO BARGAIN FOR YOUR BELOVED'S LIFE?



SHE IS VERY BEAUTIFUL! BUT THERE IS ONE, EQUALLY BEAUTIFUL, FOR WHOM I WILL EXCHANGE HER! YOU MUST COME WITH ME, AND HELP ME! YOU MUST WITNESS THE OTHER'S DEATH, FOR ONLY WITH MORTAL EYES LOOKING ON, CAN THE EXCHANGE TAKE EFFECT! ARE YOU READY TO ACCOMPANY ME?

YES... WHAT MUST I DO?



YES! BUT LET ME GO TO VICKI FIRST!

IT IS FORBIDDEN! SHE IS STILL OURS. IF YOU FAIL ME! COME, MORTAL, IT IS TIME!

SOON...

THERE IS THE ONE WHO MUST DIE IN PLACE OF YOUR BELOVED! SHE IS A GREAT ENEMY OF THE WITCHES! IN THE OLDEN DAYS, HER FAMILY WERE THE FIERCEST WITCH HUNTERS! AND NOW SHE CARRIES ON THE TASKS THEY SET!

YOU WANT TO KILL HER BECAUSE YOU FEAR HER!



WE FEAR NOTHING, EXCEPT THE LIGHT OF DAY! THAT-- AND DEATH AT THE STAKE, BY BURNING-- OR BEING PIERCED THROUGH THE BODY-- FOR THEN WE ARE TOTALLY DESTROYED! IF SHE EVER CAUGHT ANY OF US, THAT WOULD BE OUR FATE!



YOU MUST WATCH CLOSELY! FOR IF YOU AVERT YOUR EYES, YOUR LOVED ONE DIES! YOU UNDERSTAND? WITHOUT A MORTAL WATCHING, THE EXCHANGE WILL FAIL!



I-- I'LL WATCH!

LIKE A MAN BEWITCHED, TOM WATCHED, FASCINATED BY THE GHASTLY SCENE THAT UNFOLDED BEFORE HIM...

HEE! HEE! YOU HAVE BEEN SEEKING US LONG! NOW-- I AM HERE! AND YOU SHALL DIE! WITCH HUNTER! YOUR BEAUTY SHALL BE THE SHELL TO HIDE MY UGLY SOUL! YOU WILL DIE! BUT I WILL BE ETERNAL!



NO! BEGONE, CREATURE OF THE NIGHT! FOUL FIEND! BEGONE!



NOW! DIE!

AIEEE!

NOW, CARRY HER BACK TO THE GLEN! HURRY! FOR SOON IT WILL BE DAWN, AND THEN THE NIGHT OF THE EXCHANGE WILL BE ENDED! LIFT HER!



BACK AT THE WITCHES' GLEN...

HAIL, SISTERS! I HAVE RETURNED! AND THIS MORTAL BEARS THE BODY OF THE ONE WITH WHICH I SHALL MAKE THE EXCHANGE! PREPARE FOR THE RITUAL!

HAIL, SISTER! IN THE DARK OF THE EVIL NIGHT WE SHALL PERFORM THE RITES TO MAKE YOU YOUNG AGAIN!



THE SHRILL INCANTATIONS ROSE TO A HIDEOUS PEAK, AS THE WITCHES ADDED THEIR UNBARTHLY INGREDIENTS TO THE BOILING CAULDRON, UNTIL STEAM SPEWED FROM IT IN A THICK CURTAIN, ENFOLDING TOM, THE CORPSE, AND THE WITCH...



NOW, SISTERS! NOW!

THIS IS THE EXCHANGE!

BEFORE TOM FULLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT WAS HAPPENING, THE CORPSE IN HIS ARMS STIRRED TO LIFE, AND MOVED FROM HIM...

IT'S--IT'S UNBELIEVABLE!

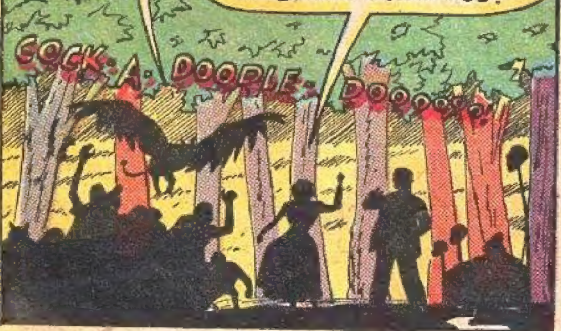
I'M YOUNG AND LOVELY! JUST AS SHE WAS! BUT NOW, THIS BEAUTIFUL BODY CONTAINS MY SOUL! AND I SHALL BE ABLE TO WALK AMONG PEOPLE, COMMIT MY EVIL DEEDS, AND NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW I AM A WITCH!



BUT AS THE MENACING CIRCLE OF CROWES CLOSED IN ABOUT HIM, SUDDENLY, LIKE A CLARION BUGLE, CAME THE CROWING OF A COCK, HERALDING THE DAWN...

WE MUST GO, SISTERS! IT IS DAWN!

I, TOO, MUST LEAVE! BUT YOU SHALL NOT ESCAPE ME! NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO--WHERE YOU ARE--I SHALL FIND YOU!



CARRYING VICKI, TOM TUMBLED BACK TO THE GROUND, WHERE SUDDENLY, TERROR OF WHAT HE HAD BEEN THROUGH BECAME TOO MUCH, AND HE COLLAPSED...



FROM THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS PIT OF SENSELESSNESS, TOM FELT HIMSELF MOVING BACK INTO THE WORLD OF LIGHT AND SOUND AND REALITY...

VICKI! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? THE WITCHES... I... WHERE AM I?

IN A HOSPITAL, DEAR! I CAME TO, AFTER THE CRASH, AND BROUGHT HELP! YOU'RE NOT BADLY HURT!



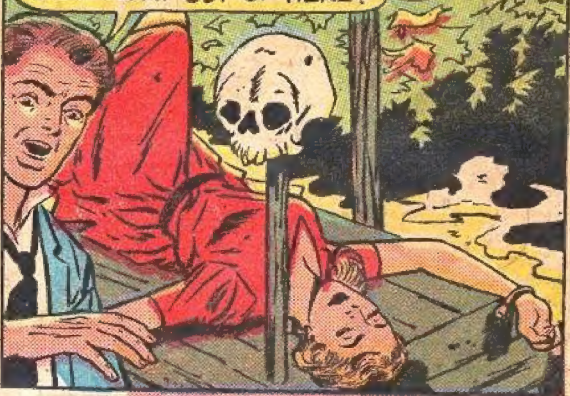
NO ONE, THAT IS, BUT YOU! SISTERS, THIS ONE MUST DIE! FOR HE HAS SEEN THE EXCHANGE, AND HE CAN EXPOSE ME!

NO! NO! WAIT! I'LL NEVER TELL! LET ME LEAVE WITH VICKI!



AND AS THEY HAD COME, THE EVIL ASSEMBLY VANISHED. THE NOW BEAUTIFUL WITCH FLEEING INTO THE GLOOM OF PRE-DAWN DARKNESS, LEAVING ONLY VICKI AND TOM...

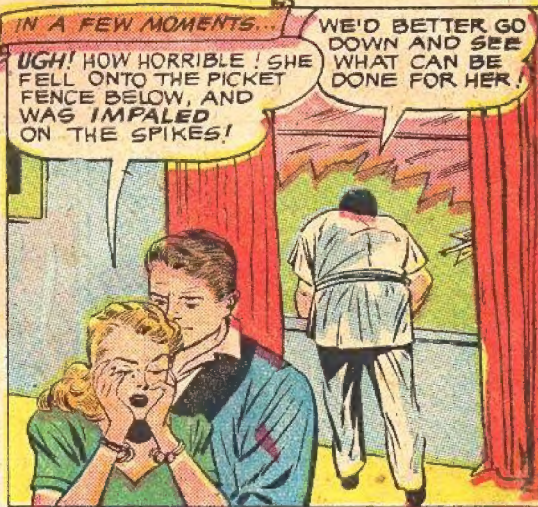
THEY--THEY'RE GONE! I MUST GET VICKI OUT OF HERE!



JUST A MILD CONCUSSION! SEEMS TO HAVE KNOCKED YOU INTO A FANTASY ABOUT WITCHES! YOU'VE BEEN RAVING ABOUT THEM FOR AN HOUR! I'LL SEND A NURSE IN WITH A SEDATIVE! WE'D BETTER LEAVE HIM, MISS!

IT--IT WAS TOO REAL! IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN A FANTASY! I KNOW IT! I SAW IT! I WAS THERE! I BELIEVE! I BELIEVE, I TELL YOU!





THE GIRL WAS TAKEN FROM THE FENCE, AND IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING THE DOCTORS COULD DO...



?

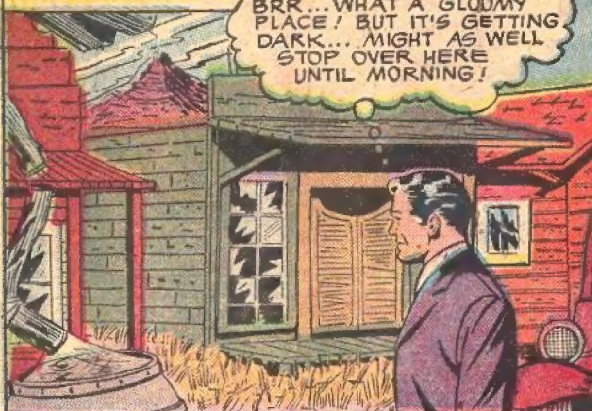
The End

BAFFLING MYSTERIES

#3

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE AMERICAN WEST, TOWNS SEEMED TO SPRING UP ALMOST OVERNIGHT, AS GOLD OR SILVER LODES WERE DISCOVERED BY EAGER PROSPECTORS. BUT ONCE THE RICH VEINS WERE EXHAUSTED, THE PEOPLE MOVED ON TO MORE FERTILE GROUND, LEAVING "GHOST TOWNS" TO DOT THE LANDSCAPE. IN 1927, A YOUNG TOURIST NAMED BERT ALDRICH DROVE HIS SEDAN INTO MYSTIC, A DESERTED AND DELAPIDATED TOWN SOMEWHERE IN THE WEST...

IT WAS EARLY EVENING, ON OCTOBER 31ST, AS HE STEPPED FROM HIS SEDAN INTO THE DUST-COVERED STREET...



BRR... WHAT A GLOOMY PLACE! BUT IT'S GETTING DARK... MIGHT AS WELL STOP OVER HERE UNTIL MORNING!

BUT BERT ALDRICH RECEIVED THE SHOCK OF HIS LIFE, AS HE ENTERED WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS A DESERTED SALOON AND GAMBLING HALL, TO FIND...



WHA...! THIS PLACE IS CROWDED WITH PEOPLE... DRESSED IN THE FASHION OF THE 1870'S! I THOUGHT THIS WAS A DESERTED GHOST TOWN!



SUDDENLY... YOU CHEATED, MISTER! I SAW YOU SLIP THAT THIRD ACE FROM YOUR SLEEVE!

WHY, YOU...!

IN A MOMENT, THE GAMBLING HALL WAS A BEDLAM OF SHOOTING AND FIGHTING. OIL LAMPS WERE UPSET, AND IN SWIFT SECONDS, A LIVELY BLAZE HAD STARTED...



FIRE! I'LL BE TRAPPED... BETTER GET OUT OF HERE FAST!

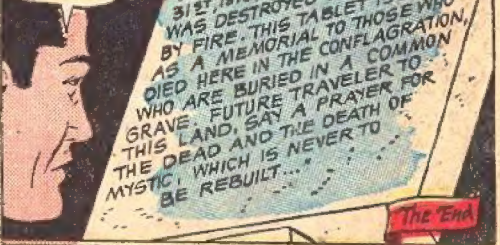
BANG!
BANG!



THE WHOLE TOWN WILL BURN... NO WAY TO STOP IT! BUT WHAT COULD HAVE CAUSED IT? WHO WERE THE PEOPLE WHO WERE HERE FOR LIVES?

YOUNG ALDRICH SLEPT FITFULLY IN HIS CAR THAT NIGHT. THE FOLLOWING MORNING HE WAS UTTERLY AMAZED TO FIND THAT NO SIGN OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S FIRE EXISTED... NO CHARRED RUINS... NO TOWNSFOLK... BUT HE DID FIND SOMETHING...

THIS TABLE... I DIDN'T NOTICE IT LAST NIGHT! BUT THIS IS INCREDIBLE... IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED SO LONG AGO! I SAW IT, LAST NIGHT!



ON THE EVE OF OCTOBER 31ST, 1870, THE TOWN OF MYSTIC WAS DESTROYED ON THIS SITE BY FIRE. THIS TABLET IS SET UP AS A MEMORIAL TO THOSE WHO DIED HERE IN THE CONFLAGRATION, WHO ARE BURIED IN A COMMON GRAVE. FUTURE TRAVELER FOR THIS LAND, SAY A PRAYER FOR THE DEAD AND THE DEATH OF MYSTIC, WHICH IS NEVER TO BE REBUILT...

The End

HOW COULD BERT ALDRICH WITNESS AN EVENT IN 1927 WHICH HAD OCCURRED ON THIS SAME DATE, BUT FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS BEFORE? JUST ANOTHER BAFFLING MYSTERY IN THE ANNALS OF THE SUPERNATURAL!

FATAL RENDEZVOUS

STOP THE ANESTHESIA, DR. ROGERS. PASS ME THE SCALPEL, NURSE. THIS IS A NASTY JOB! HE HAS A TUMOR AS LARGE AS AN EGG PRESSING ON THE CEREBELLUM!

ONLY A MAN OF YOUR ABILITY WOULD UNDERTAKE SUCH AN OPERATION, FARRELL! THE MAN'S LUCKY TO HAVE YOU AS HIS SURGEON!



NO ONE HAS EVER RETURNED FROM THE BEYOND TO TELL US WHAT DEATH REALLY IS. THEREFORE, MEN HAVE ALWAYS FEARED DEATH AS THE GRIM DESTROYER, THE END-ALL, THE COSMIC BLANK. AS WARNER DAVIS LAY UPON THE OPERATING TABLE, AWAITING THE SURGEON'S INCISIVE ACTION, THESE THOUGHTS CROSSED HIS BRAIN. THEN THE ETHER CONE DESCENDED AND DARKNESS FLOODED HIS CONSCIOUSNESS...

A HALF HOUR PASSED...

RESPIRATION VERY RAPID, PULSE FAINT. DR. FARRELL, I THINK...

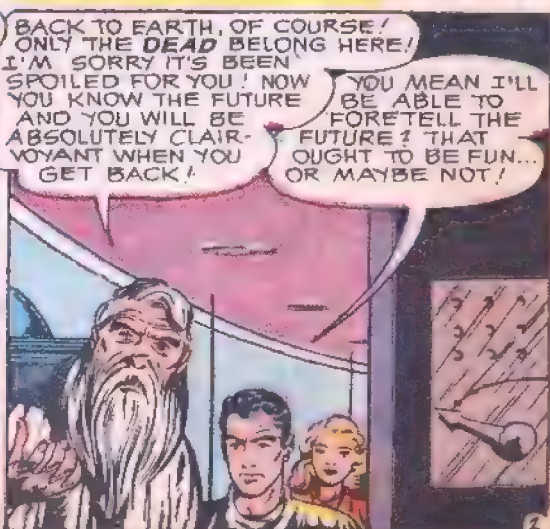
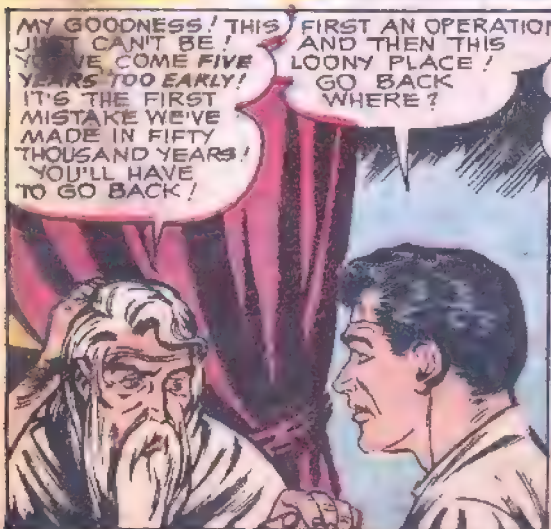
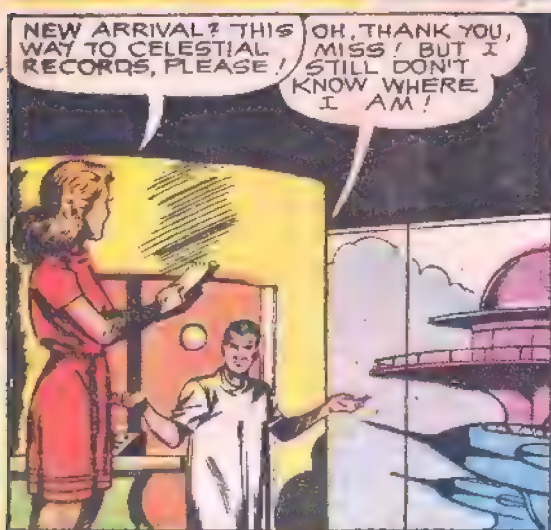
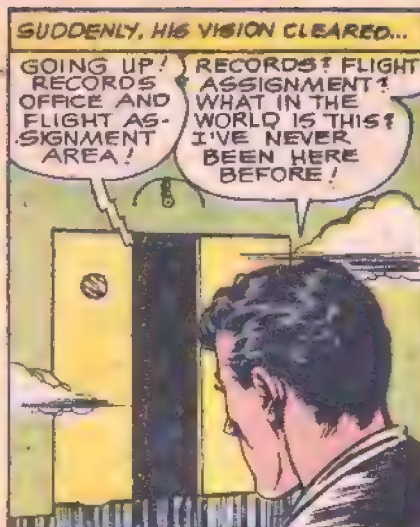
DON'T THINK, MAN! GIVE HIM OXYGEN, QUICKLY!



HIS PULSE IS GONE! I'M AFRAID HE'S DEAD!

IT'S FANTASTIC! THERE'S NO TUMOR PRESENT AT ALL! HAND ME THE ADRENALIN HYPO!





BACK, BACK THROUGH THE MYRIAD DAZZLING LIGHTS HURTLIED WARNER DAVIS...



WITH A JOLT, HE SAT UPRIGHT ON THE OPERATING TABLE!

GOOD HEAVENS, WE GAVE YOU UP FOR DEAD A MOMENT AGO, AND NOW... LIE DOWN, MR. DAVIS, BEFORE YOU HAVE A RE-LAPSE! HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY BE SITTING UP?

IT WAS BEFORE MY TIME! I'LL HAVE TO RETURN IN FIVE YEARS!



IT'S ALL BEYOND MY SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE! FIRST THE TUMOR DIS-APPEARS, AND NOW YOU WALK AWAY FROM A BRAIN OPERATION WITHOUT A STAGGER!

IT WAS ALL A MISTAKE! THE FIRST ONE THEY HAD IN FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS! OH, BY THE WAY, DR. FARRELL, I WANT TO WARN YOU ABOUT SOMETHING!



I JUST HAD A PRE-MONITION! BETTER GET YOURSELF A NEW ANESTHETIST FOR TONIGHT'S OPERATION. DR. ROGERS WILL COLLAPSE ON YOU AND YOUR PATIENT WILL DIE!

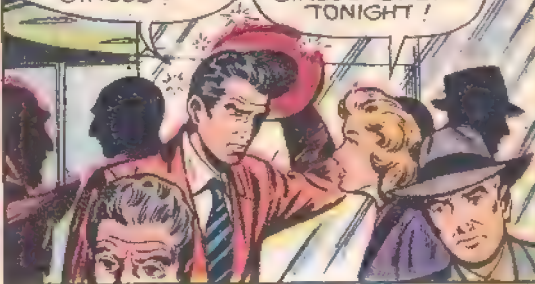
THAT'S A BRUTAL JOKE! BUT WAIT, HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS GOING TO OPERATE TONIGHT AND USE DR. ROGERS?



AS WARNER LEFT THE SHOCKED STAFF OF THE HOSPITAL...

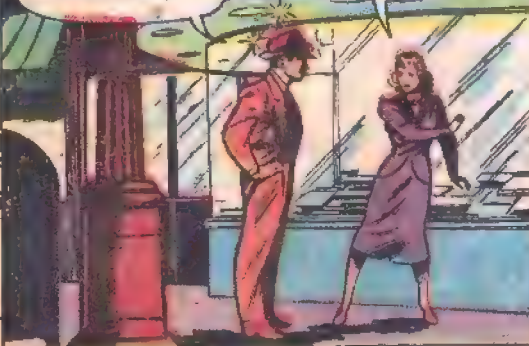
PARDON ME, BUT AREN'T YOU A TRAPEZE ARTIST OR AERIALIST AT THE FARNUM CIRCUS?

WHY, YES! I'M LUCIA LANOS! YOU MUST HAVE SEEN MY PICTURE IN THE PAPERS. THE CIRCUS OPENS TONIGHT!



I NEVER SAW YOU BEFORE IN MY LIFE, MISS LANOS, BUT I HAVE A DISTINCT VISION OF YOUR FALLING 75 FEET TO YOUR DEATH! DON'T GO ON TONIGHT!

HOW DARE YOU! YOU ARE JUST TRYING TO FRIGHTEN ME! GO AWAY BEFORE I CALL THE POLICE!



THAT NIGHT, AT FAIRFIELD HOSPITAL, AS DR. FARRELL OPERATED...

ROGERS! WHAT'S THE MATTER?

I-- I DON'T KNOW! MY HEART!



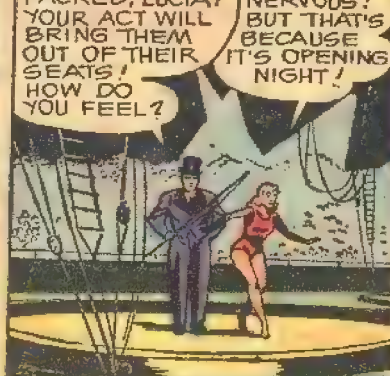
NURSE, WHEEL IN ANOTHER OXYGEN CONTAINER, QUICKLY! CHECK THOSE CLAMPS! ROGERS! ROGERS-- ROGERS! HE... HE'S DEAD!

WHAT A GHASTLY EXPERIENCE! DR. ROGERS AND MY PATIENT, BOTH DEAD! I WAS WARNED BY DAVIS, BUT HOW WAS I TO KNOW THAT HE WAS CLAIRVOYANT! IT'S INCREDIBLE!

AT PRECISELY THIS TIME IN THE MADISON ARENA, WHERE THE FARNUM CIRCUS OPENED...

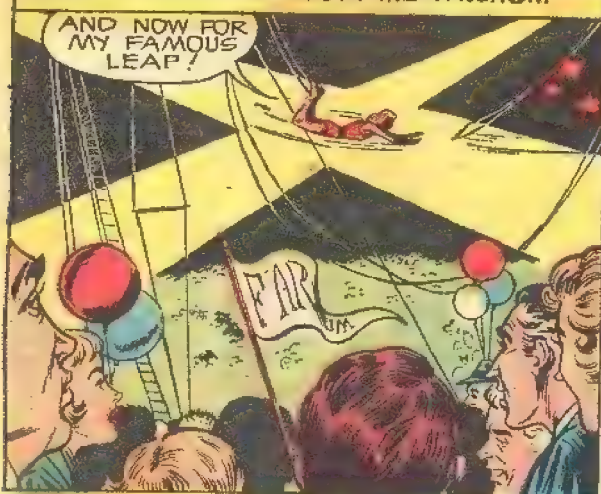
THE HOUSE IS PACKED, LUCIA! YOUR ACT WILL BRING THEM OUT OF THEIR SEATS! HOW DO YOU FEEL?

A BIT NERVOUS! BUT THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S OPENING NIGHT!



SEVENTY-FIVE FEET ABOVE THE GROUND...

AND NOW FOR MY FAMOUS LEAP!



LIKE A PROJECTILE, LUCIA SHOT EARTHWARD AS HER FINGERS GRASPED FOR AND MISSED THE TRAPEZE!

AIIEEE!



LUCIA MISSED THE NET! HE--SHE'S DEAD!

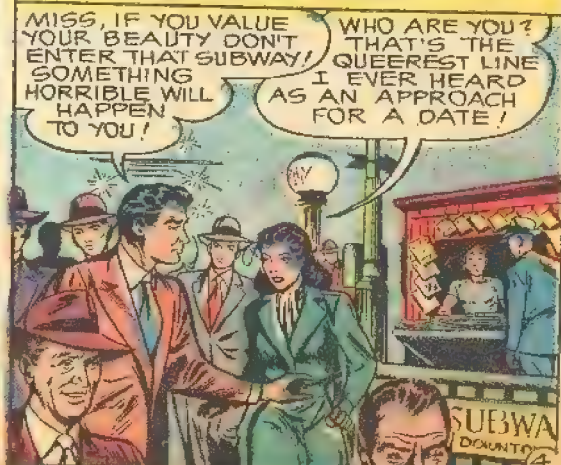
GET THAT BAND PLAYING BEFORE THE AUDIENCE PANICS! WE MUST GO ON!



SEVERAL WEEKS LATER, AT THE ENTRANCE TO A DOWNTOWN SUBWAY...

MISS, IF YOU VALUE YOUR BEAUTY DON'T ENTER THAT SUBWAY! SOMETHING HORRIBLE WILL HAPPEN TO YOU!

WHO ARE YOU? THAT'S THE QUEEREST LINE I EVER HEARD AS AN APPROACH FOR A DATE!



SUBWAY DOWNTOWN 4

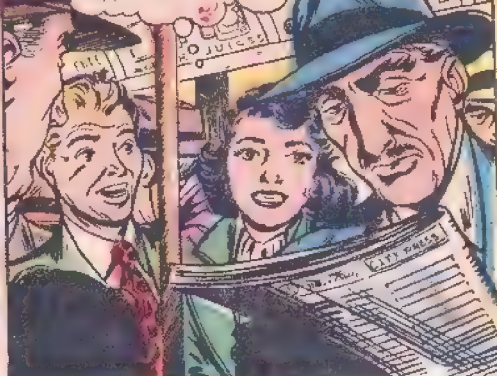
I DIDN'T ASK YOU FOR A DATE! I ONLY WANT TO SAVE YOU PAIN AND GRIEF! IF YOU ENTER THAT SUBWAY, YOUR CROWNING BEAUTY, YOUR HAIR, WILL BE SNOW WHITE BEFORE MORNING!

LET ME GO, YOU CRAZY MADMAN! YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE NUTS WHO GETS PLEASURE OUT OF FRIGHTENING PEOPLE! YOU BELONG IN AN ASYLUM!



THE EXPRESS WAS JAMPACKED...

WHEW! I JUST MADE IT! I ALMOST MISSED THE EXPRESS BECAUSE THAT WEIRD CHARACTER HELD ME UP!



FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, IN MID-TUNNEL...

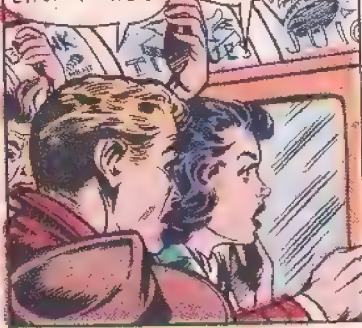
AIEEE! WHAT HAPPENED?

WE'RE STOPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TUNNEL!



LOOK! WATER! THE TUNNEL'S CAVED IN AND THE WATER IS FLOODING IT! THERE'S TWO FEET THERE ALREADY! WE'LL BE DROWNED LIKE RATS!

HELP! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT!



BREAK THE WINDOWS! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

THAT CRAZY MAN WAS RIGHT! LET ME OUT! DON'T LET ME DIE HERE!



SCREAMS ECHOED THROUGH THE DARKENED TUNNEL AS MADLY FRIGHTENED PEOPLE BROKE THROUGH THE WINDOWS AND JUMPED INTO THE RISING FLOOD...

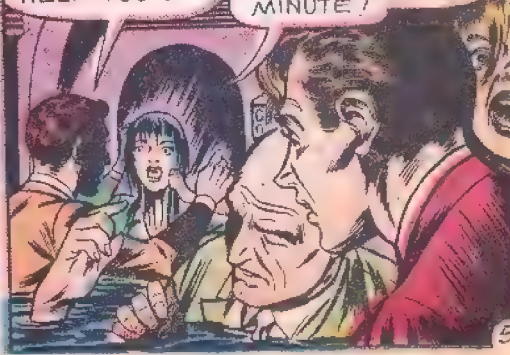
IT'S RISING! SOON IT WILL BE OVER OUR HEADS! OH, WHY DIDN'T I LISTEN TO THAT MAN? GET OUT OF MY WAY! YOU'RE PUSHING ME UNDER!



AFTER AN HOUR OF AGONIZING STRUGGLING...

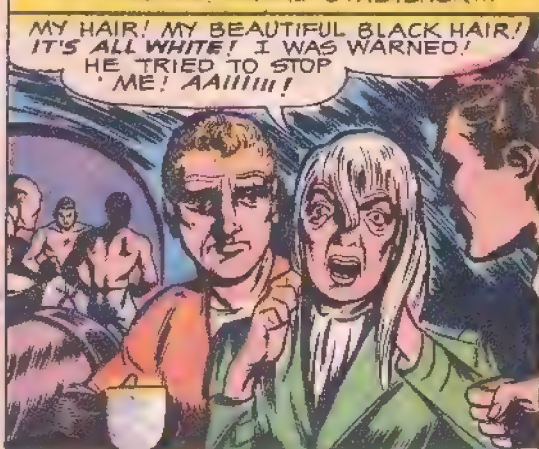
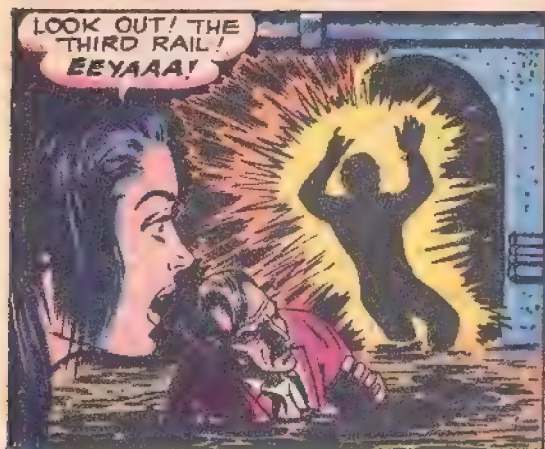
LOOK! WE'RE SAFE! THOSE STEPS LEAD TO ANOTHER SECTION OF THE SUBWAY! C'MON, I'LL HELP YOU UP!

OH, THANK HEAVENS! I DON'T THINK I COULD HAVE LASTED ANOTHER MINUTE!

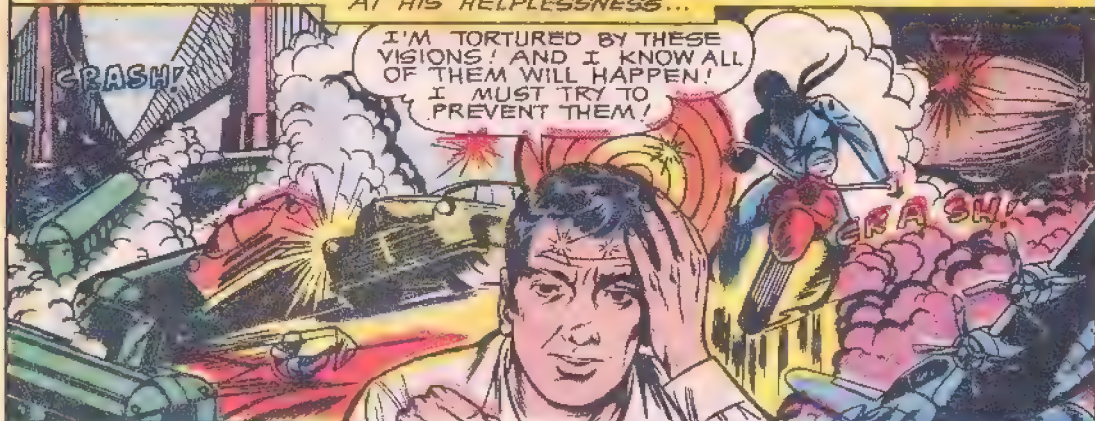


BUT AS HER RESCUER STEPPED FORWARD INTO THE NEW PASSAGE ...

WHEN SHE REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS ON A RESCUE SQUAD STRETCHER...

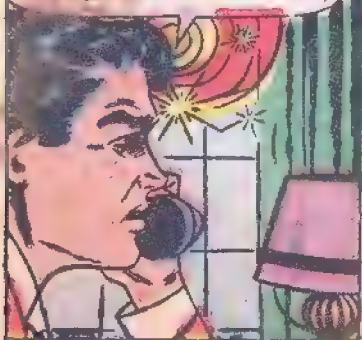


AND IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS HOTEL ROOM, WARNER DAVIS LIVED THROUGH ALL THE HORRIBLE EVENTS THAT WERE YET TO COME, AND WRITHED IN AGONY AT HIS HELPLESSNESS...



BUT AFTER THE FIFTH PHONE CALL, WARNER GAVE UP...

BUT I TELL YOU THE TRAIN WILL CRASH! TAKE IT OFF YOUR SCHEDULE! WHAT? HOW DO I KNOW? I CAN FORETELL THE FUTURE! BELIEVE ME, I'M NOT CRAZY! WHA...? HE HUNG UP ON ME! AHH, WHAT'S THE USE?

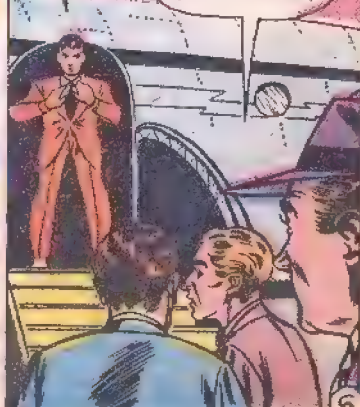


I JUST CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! I CAN'T EAT OR SLEEP! DRIVER, TAKE ME TO THE AIRPORT!



I TELL YOU THE PLANE WILL CRASH! DON'T GO ABOARD! LISTEN TO ME!

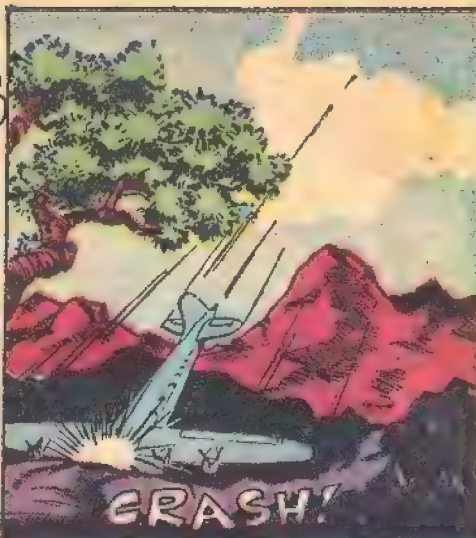
OUT OF THE WAY, LUNATIC! HOW IS IT YOU DON'T MIND DYING? YOU'RE JUST A HYSTERICAL IDIOT! LET ME PASS!



A FEW HOURS LATER, OVER SOME HIGH PEAKS IN THE ROCKIES...

TIGHTEN YOUR SAFETY BELTS AND PREPARE FOR A CRASH! OUR MOTORS HAVE FAILED!

THE FOOLS WOULDN'T LISTEN! THIS IS THE MOMENT I'VE WAITED FOR! NOW I CAN ESCAPE INTO DEATH FROM THIS CONTINUOUS AGONY!



AGAIN WARNER PASSED THROUGH THE DOOR OF DARKNESS INTO THE BLINDING LIGHT OF THE STRANGE, CLOUDBORNE WORLD...

NO, NO, MR. DAVIS! I TOLD YOU BEFORE YOU WERE MUCH TOO EARLY! YOU'LL HAVE TO GO BACK! WE'RE NOT READY FOR YOU!

BUT I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE! THE VISIONS OF DESTRUCTION AND HUMAN TRAGEDY BURN MY SOUL! LET ME STAY, PLEASE!



BUT ARGUMENT WAS USELESS. WARNER WAS SWEEPED BACK TO EARTHLY CONSCIOUSNESS...

YOU'RE THE LUCKIEST MAN IN THE WORLD, MISTER! OUT OF FORTY PEOPLE, YOU'RE THE ONLY SURVIVOR! HOW DID YOU DO IT?

I--I DON'T KNOW! I GUESS IT JUST WASN'T MY TURN TO DIE!



ALMOST FIVE YEARS HAD PASSED, AND A BROKEN, QUICKLY-AGED MAN FOUND HIMSELF BACK ON AN OPERATING TABLE IN FAIRFIELD HOSPITAL. DIAGNOSIS: TUMOR OF THE BRAIN!

THIS TIME WE'RE GOING TO HEAL YOU PERMANENTLY, MR. DAVIS! YOU'LL BE UP AND ABOUT IN A WEEK!

NO, DR. FARRELL! MY TIME HAS COME! THE OPERATION WILL BE UNSUCCESSFUL!



THE ANESTHESIA UNLOCKED THE DOORS TO THE STRANGE, LIGHT-FLOODED WORLD...

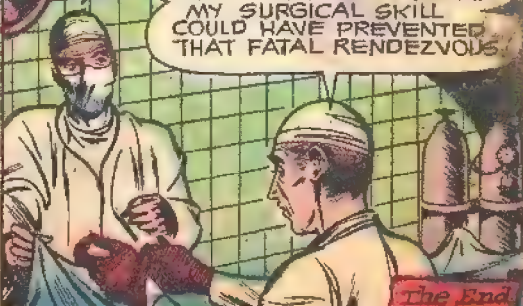
WELCOME, MR. DAVIS! YOU'RE RIGHT ON TIME! I'M ASSIGNING YOU TO "A" FLIGHT. A VERY NICE DESTINATION, AND THIS TIME, YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO BACK!



AND BACK IN THE OPERATING ROOM...

HE'S DEAD! WHO WAS THIS MAN, DR. FARRELL?

WARNER DAVIS WAS A CLAIRVOYANT WHO FELT HE HAD AN APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH! HE WAS ALMOST EAGER FOR IT, AND I DON'T THINK ALL MY SURGICAL SKILL COULD HAVE PREVENTED THAT FATAL RENDEZVOUS.

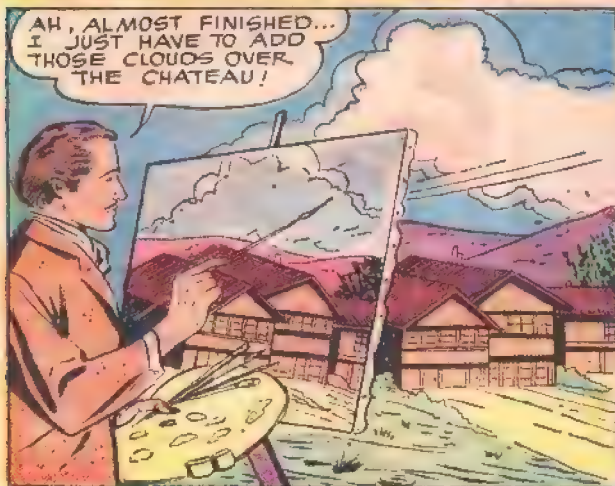


The End

BAFFLING MYSTERIES

4

IN 1897, PIERRE PAITEL, A PAINTER, FELL IN LOVE WITH EMILIE, BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER OF THE COUNT OF MONCEAU. THE OLD NOBLEMAN HAD FORBIDDEN THE MATCH. THEREFORE, THE YOUNG LOVERS WERE COMPELLED TO MEET SECRETLY. ONE DAY, PIERRE WAS PAINTING A LANDSCAPE WITH THE COUNT'S CHATEAU AS THE CENTRAL OBJECT IN HIS WORK OF ART...



AH, ALMOST FINISHED... I JUST HAVE TO ADD THOSE CLOUDS OVER THE CHATEAU!

AS PIERRE COMPLETED THE PAINTING, EMILIE ARRIVED TO KEEP HER LAST RENDEZVOUS WITH THE MAN SHE LOVED...

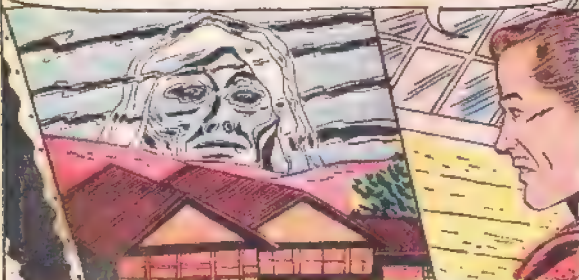
IT IS HOPELESS, PIERRE! FATHER WILL NEVER CONSENT TO OUR MARRIAGE! I WISH I WERE DEAD!

YOU MUST NOT SAY SUCH TERRIBLE THINGS, CHERIE! I WILL GO TO PARIS AND SELL MY PAINTING! THEN I SHALL SEND FOR YOU AND WE SHALL BE MARRIED!



MONTHS LATER, IN PARIS, PIERRE HAD STILL NOT BEEN ABLE TO SELL HIS PAINTING. THEN, ONE DAY, HE NOTICED A STRANGE THING...

MON DIEU! THE CLOUDS OVER THE CHATEAU IN THE PAINTING... THEY HAVE CHANGED THEIR SHAPE! THEY NOW LOOK LIKE... LIKE AN ANGEL OF DEATH HOVERING OVER THE CHATEAU! EMILIE! COULD IT BE THAT...?



PIERRE HASTENED TO THE CHATEAU OF HIS BELOVED, ONLY TO FIND...

A FUNERAL CORTEGE! MY PREMONITION WAS RIGHT! BUT WHO HAS DIED? I MUST FIND OUT...



THE KINDLY OLD GARDENER VERIFIED PIERRE'S WORST FEARS...

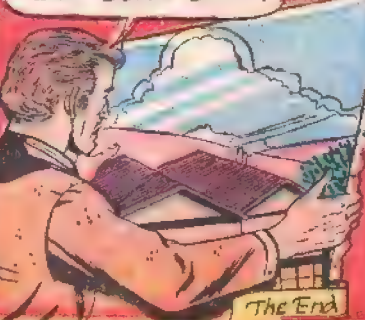
OUI, IT IS THE YOUNG DAUGHTER WHO HAS DIED! 'TIS SAID SHE WOULD NOT EAT, AND WASTED AWAY FOR LOVE OF A YOUNG ARTIST IN PARIS! HE HAD PROMISED TO SEND FOR HER, BUT HE FORGOT HER! POOR SOUL... SHE DIED FOR LOVE!

MY DARLING EMILIE, I DID NOT FORGET! I COULD NOT SELL MY PAINTING... I HAD NO MONEY TO SEND FOR YOU AND MARRY YOU!



HEARTBROKEN, PIERRE RETURNED TO HIS STUDIO IN PARIS...

THE CLOUDS ARE AGAIN AS THEY WERE! YET THAT DEATH-FIGURE DID TAKE SHAPE ON THE DAY EMILIE DIED... I'M SURE OF IT!



WHAT SUPER-NATURAL POWER HAD GRANTED THE VISION OF DEATH ON HIS PAINTING TO THE YOUNG ARTIST, TO TELL HIM OF HIS BELOVED'S DEATH? OR PERHAPS IT WAS ONLY A FIGMENT OF PIERRE'S IMAGINATION! WHAT DO YOU THINK, READERS?

The End

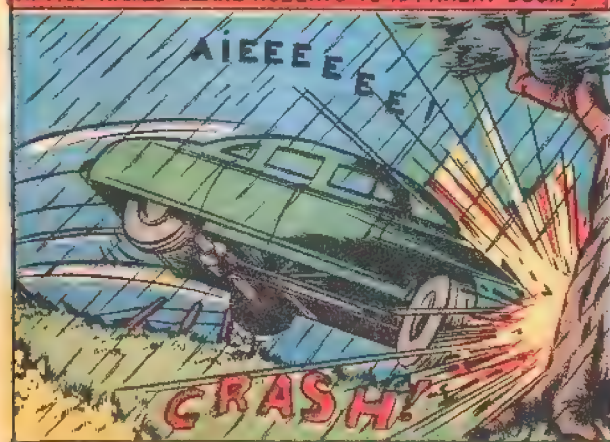
HORROR ON CANVAS

IN A SPLIT SECOND, A CAREFREE LIFE WAS TURNED INTO A THING OF HORROR, AND THE FIRES OF LOVE BECAME THE GLOWING EMBERS OF DEADLY HATRED! AND IN THIS TALE, A MAN WHOSE MISSION WAS TO GREAT BEAUTY, BECAME A TWISTED CREATURE OF DEATH, AND HIS ONCE SKILLED BRUSH PAINTED HORROR ON CANVAS!

I CAN'T CONTROL THE CAR! IT'S SKIDDING! I'M GOING TO CRASH!



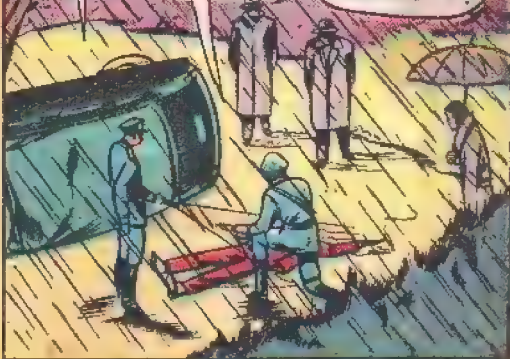
ON A WILD, RAIN-SWEPT NIGHT, A SPEEDING CAR SKIDDED OUT OF CONTROL, TO CRASH WITH SICKENING IMPACT, RENDING METAL AND GLASS, CARRYING A YOUNG ARTIST NAMED BLAKE ROBERTS TO APPARENT DOOM!



SOON AFTER THE CRASH...

UGH! WHAT A MESS! THAT FACE!

YEAH, THE POOR GUY! HE'S BETTER OFF DEAD! I'LL GO CALL THE MORGUE WAGON, JOE! IN TWENTY YEARS ON THE FORCE, I NEVER SAW ANYBODY THAT MESS'D UP!



THAT MIDNIGHT, THERE WAS A BROKEN SILENCE WHERE THE HAND OF DEATH WAS HARSHTEST—THE CITY MORGUE, FOR SUDDENLY ONE OF THE SHROUDED, STILL FORMS GROANED AND SAT UP...



WHERE-- WHERE... AM... I?
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

THE MORGUE / I'M IN THE MORGUE / I REMEMBER... THE CRASH... WHY... THEY... THINK I'M DEAD / I... MUST GET OUT OF HERE! I'M NOT DEAD! I DON'T BELONG HERE!



THEN...

HEY, YOU / WHO ARE YOU? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

BACK TO THE LIVING WHERE I BELONG!



WHAT'S THE MATTER, MAC? ARE YOU NUTS OR SOMETHIN'? AHHHH! THAT FACE!

YOU'RE TRYING TO MAKE ME STAY IN THIS HOUSE OF DEATH, WHEN I BELONG WITH THE LIVING! NOTHING SHALL STOP ME!



THEN, BLAKE ROBERTS SAW HIS MANGLED FACE REFLECTED IN THE MIRROR, AND THE FULL IMPACT OF THE HORROR THAT HAD BEFALLEN HIM, STRUCK WITH SICKENING REALITY!

MY FACE! MY FACE! MY FACE!



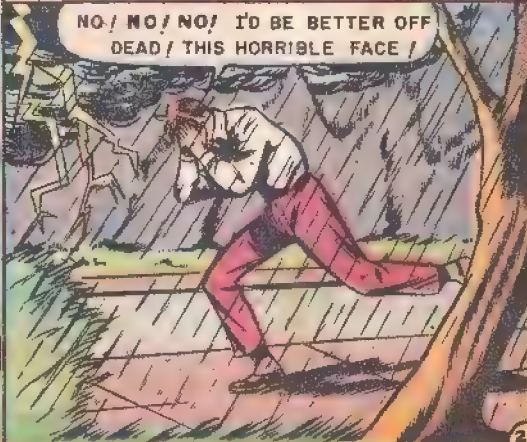
NO! YOU'RE CHOKING ME! AGGHHH!

DIE! SINCE MY FACE REVOLTS YOU, YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO LOOK AT IT AGAIN!

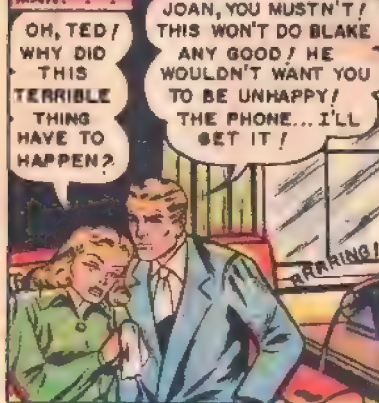


OUT INTO THE RAGING STORM HE FLED, KNOWING THE AWFUL TRUTH, KNOWING THAT NOW, HE WOULD BE SHUNNED BY ALL MEN!

NO! NO! NO! I'D BE BETTER OFF DEAD! THIS HORRIBLE FACE!



AND AS ALWAYS, THE WEIGHT OF TRAGEDY FELL ON THE SHOULDERS OF THE ONES LEFT BEHIND, AND IN THE APARTMENT OF JOAN GORDON, BLAKE'S FIANCEE, THERE WERE TEARS AND SORROW FOR THE DEAD MAN.



OH, TED! WHY DID THIS TERRIBLE THING HAVE TO HAPPEN?

JOAN, YOU MUSTN'T! THIS WON'T DO BLAKE ANY GOOD! HE WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO BE UNHAPPY! THE PHONE... I'LL GET IT!

I'M SPEAKING FOR MISS GORDON! THIS IS TED SAYLOR! WHAT? IT-CAN'T BE! ALL RIGHT, WE'LL BE THERE SHORTLY!



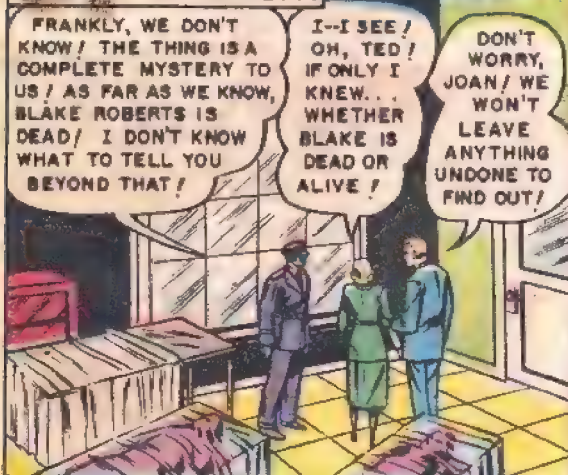
WHAT IS IT, TED? WHAT HAPPENED?

JOAN, BRACE YOURSELF FOR A SHOCK! BLAKE'S BODY HAS DISAPPEARED FROM THE MORGUE / AND AN ATTENDANT WAS MURDERED!



WHAT? CAN IT BE THAT BLAKE IS--IS ALIVE?

LATER, AT THE MORGUE...



FRANKLY, WE DON'T KNOW! THE THING IS A COMPLETE MYSTERY TO US / AS FAR AS WE KNOW, BLAKE ROBERTS IS DEAD! I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YOU BEYOND THAT!

I--I SEE! OH, TED! IF ONLY I KNEW... WHETHER BLAKE IS DEAD OR ALIVE!

DON'T WORRY, JOAN! WE WON'T LEAVE ANYTHING UNDONE TO FIND OUT!

BUT THE DAYS BECAME WEEKS, AND THE WEEKS MONTHS, AND SIX MONTHS LATER, BLAKE ROBERTS, IN A GARRET STUDIO IN AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN PART OF THE SPRINGING CITY, WAS HARD AT WORK, PAINTING...

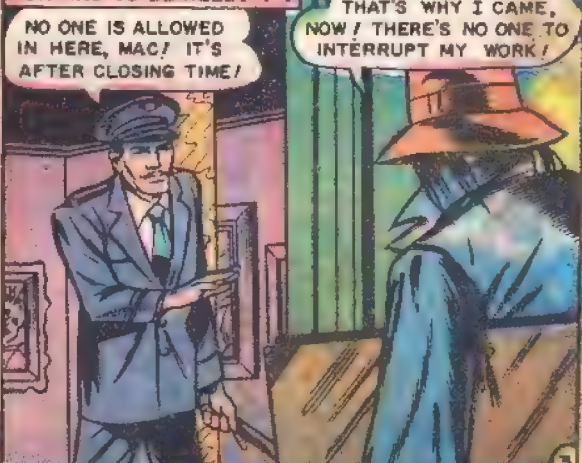
THEY USED TO SAY THAT I PAINTED BEAUTY! BUT NOW, I HAVE ONLY HATRED AND HORROR IN MY HEART! BEAUTY IS GONE FOR ME! NOW, I PAINT HORROR ON CANVAS!



I READ IN THE PAPERS THAT JOAN AND TED ARE GETTING MARRIED! BUT FIRST THEY'RE HOLDING A MEMORIAL EXHIBITION OF MY WORK IN THE MUSEUM! I HAVE A LITTLE SURPRISE FOR THEM, WHEN THE EXHIBIT OPENS TOMORROW! THEY'LL FIND THE MASTERPIECES OF THE NEW BLAKE ROBERTS / MASTERPIECES OF HORROR!

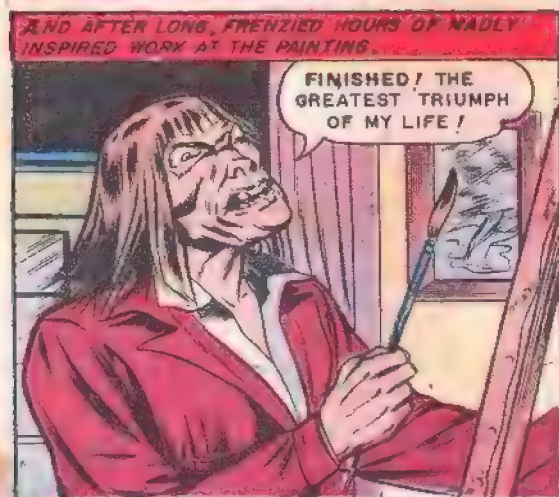
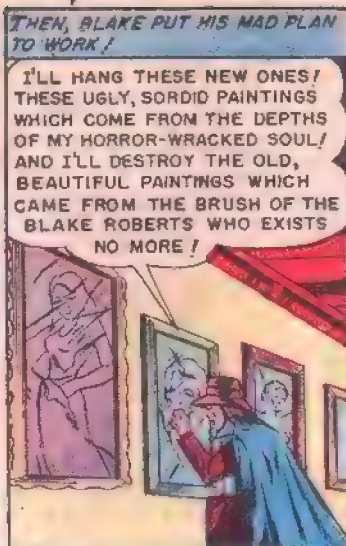


THAT EVENING, AT THE MUSEUM WHERE THE EXHIBITION WAS TO BE HELD...



NO ONE IS ALLOWED IN HERE, MAC! IT'S AFTER CLOSING TIME!

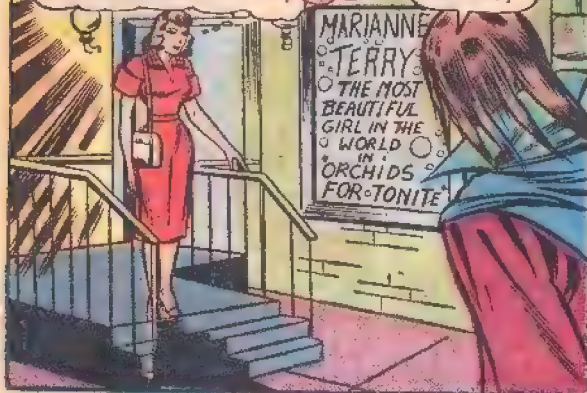
THAT'S WHY I CAME, NOW! THERE'S NO ONE TO INTERRUPT MY WORK!



AGAIN AND AGAIN HE STRUCK! GROWING BOLDER WITH EACH SLAYING, YET ABLE TO AVOID CAPTURE!

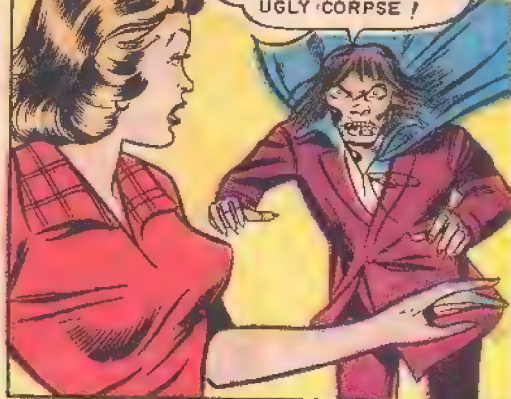
I SHOULDN'T HAVE STAYED THIS LATE! THERE'S NO ONE AROUND! I'D BETTER GET A CAB!

I'VE WAITED A LONG TIME FOR YOU!



NO!

TOO LATE! YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL, BUT IN A FEW MOMENTS, THAT BEAUTY WILL BE GONE! YOU WILL BE A CORPSE... A ROTTING, UGLY CORPSE!



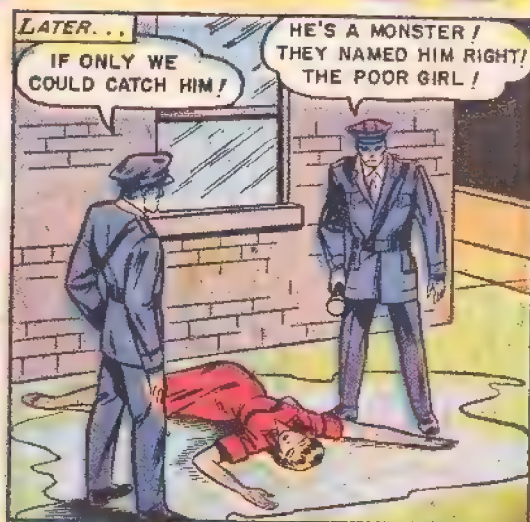
YOU'RE GROWING UGLIER AND UGLIER! I HAVE DESTROYED YOUR BEAUTY!



LATER...

IF ONLY WE COULD CATCH HIM!

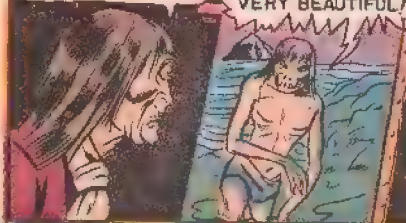
HE'S A MONSTER! THEY NAMED HIM RIGHT! THE POOR GIRL!



THE PATTERN OF DEATH CONTINUED, AND WITH EACH CRIME, BLAKE'S TWISTED MIND BECAME FURTHER LOST IN THE MAZE OF HIS HIDEOUS MADNESS. FOR NOW HE SPOKE TO THE PAINTING, AND SEEMED TO HEAR IT ANSWER HIM!

NOW TELL ME WHAT TO DO! I'VE FOLLOWED YOUR BIDDING, AND I MUST GO ON DESTROYING, BRINGING MISERY, BLIGHTING BEAUTY!

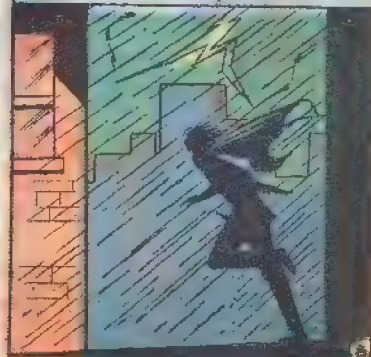
YOU'RE FORGETTING JOAN AND TED! TODAY IS THEIR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY! THEY ARE HAPPY! YOU MUST DESTROY HER, FOR JOAN IS VERY BEAUTIFUL!



YES! SHE MUST DIE TOO! SHE MUST BE MADE TO SUFFER THE EXTREME UGLINESS-- DEATH!

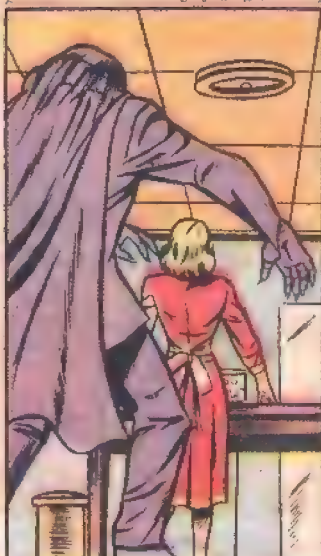


OUT INTO THE NIGHT THAT WAS WILD WITH RAIN AND LIGHTNING, A NIGHT LIKE THE ONE ON WHICH HE MET HIS ACCIDENT, BLAKE PLUNGED, IN HIS HEART A MISSION OF DEATH, HIGHLIGHTED AGAINST THE MACABRE BACKGROUND OF WIND, AND RAIN, AND LIGHTNING!



LATER, IN JOAN AND TED'S HOME, JOAN WAS GETTING READY FOR A GAY ANNIVERSARY PARTY.

THERE SHE IS! SHE LOOKS WELL AND HAPPY AND BEAUTIFUL! SOON, I'LL CHANGE ALL THAT!



I'VE COME BACK, JOAN!

YOU'RE... YOU'RE... BLAKE! AIEEEEE!

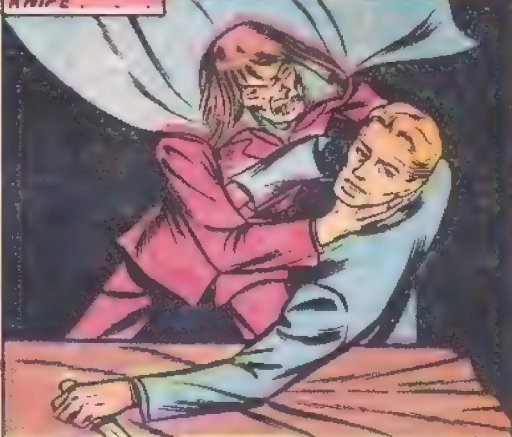


JOAN! WHA...?

I'LL KILL YOU, TOO!



THE TWO MEN LOCKED IN A DEATH STRUGGLE, AND TED'S FRANTIC HAND FOUND A BREAD KNIFE.



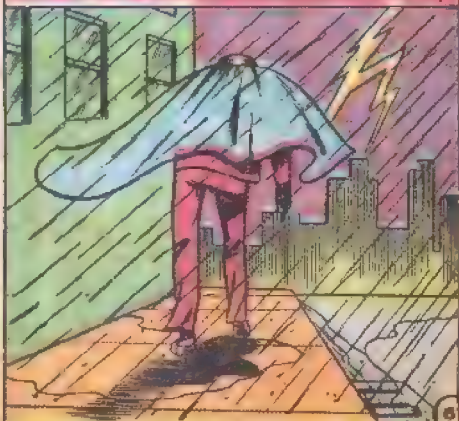
AAAAAAH!



MUST GET OUT OF HERE! THE PAINTING! BACK TO THE PAINTING!



LIKE A STRICKEN ANIMAL, BLAKE PLUNGED THROUGH THE STORM, SEEKING THE ONLY REFUGE HE KNEW, WHILE THE PURSUIT BEHIND HIM FOLLOWED ON HIS HEELS!



I'VE COME
BACK / BACK
TO YOU!

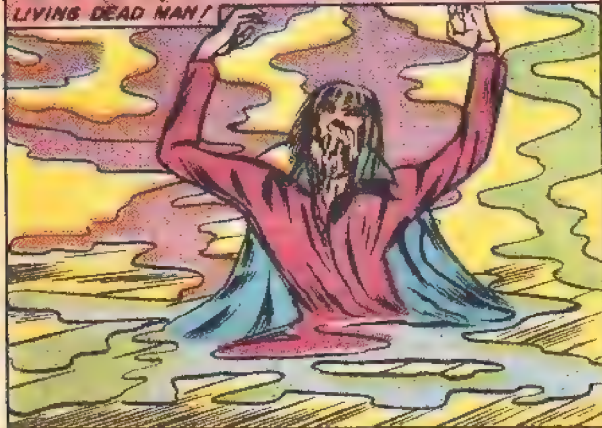
THIS IS THE END,
BLAKE ROBERTS! COME
CLOSER / FOR NOW YOU
MUST GO BACK TO THE
DEATH WHICH YOU CHEATED
A YEAR AGO!



AND AS THE
DYING MAD-
MAN STAGGER-
ED TO THE
PAINTING,
THE MON-
STROSITY HE
HAD CREATED
ENTERED
HIS BODY,
FOR THIS
PAINTING
WAS BLAKE'S
SOUL, THE
EVIL, TWIST-
ED SOUL THAT
HAD BEEN
FORMED ON
THAT NIGHT
OF HORROR
WHEN HE
AWOKE IN
THE MORGUE!



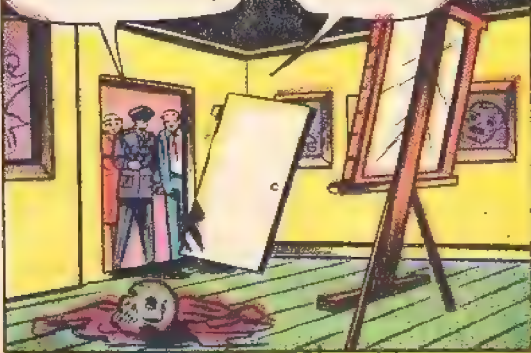
IN THE NEXT GHASTLY MOMENT, BLAKE WAS RETURN-
ED TO THE ARMS OF THE DEATH HE HAD ESCAPED!
FOR IN TRUTH, THESE PAST MONTHS HE HAD BEEN A
LIVING DEAD MAN!



AS HE CRUMPLED TO THE DUST OF THE GRAVE,
THE DOOR WAS SMASHED IN...

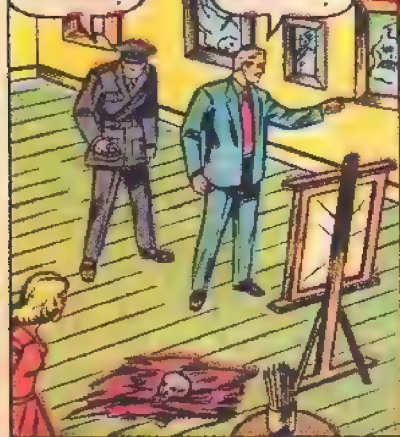
THERE'S NOBODY
HERE, MR. SAYLOR/
ARE YOU SURE YOU
FOLLOWED HIM?

YES! WHEN I
PICKED YOU MEN UP,
I SAW HIM RUN
IN HERE!



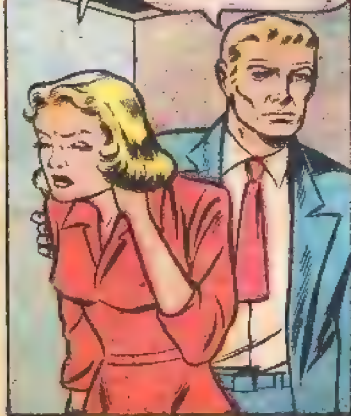
WHA...? NO
ONE HERE--
JUST THIS
SKELETON
IN RAGS!

AND THESE
HORROR PAINT-
INGS! I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
HOW...?



TED, TAKE
ME HOME!
IT'S ALL TOO
HORRIBLE!

ALL RIGHT,
DARLING! BUT I
WONDER IF WE
WILL EVER FIND
OUT WHO THE
MONSTER WAS?



I KNOW IT WAS BLAKE!
BUT WHEREVER HE IS, I'LL NOT
REVEAL THE SECRET OF HIS
TORTURED BRAIN!



PERIL OF THE HALF-DEAD

"Letrau!" suddenly called Darrell. "Why are you doing this? What purpose have you in making living skeletons out of human beings?"

Desperation and a sickening fear clamped over him as he saw that Letrau was not to be interrupted, that the needle was already scratching Rhoda's trembling throat.

"Letrau!" Darrell rasped. "Are you insane?"

The Death Master's head snapped up, the eyes glittered dangerously. Darrell was quick to follow up his advantage. "What good is it doing these poor devils to be members of the half-death?"

Once more the syringe was rested on the table. Letrau's shrill voice came in malicious triumph:

"Soon the entire world will be asking me that," he shrilled. "I will have them on their feet, begging, just as you beg now." Letrau leaned forward eagerly, stabbed his long bones of fingers in the air for emphasis.

"I will tell you. In my scientific research I found out that different parts of the human body were endowed at birth with different spans of life. In the natural course of our lives, some parts and organs of our bodies die ahead of the rest and usually take the entire organism with them. For example, a man's body may be endowed with a span of life of seventy years, but his lungs have been endowed with only a forty-year span. When the man reaches forty his lungs die, and so the rest of his body must go. If he had not inherited short-span lungs, he would have lived to be seventy, along with the rest of his body. Do you begin to see, young man?"

Letrau's voice shrieked with laughter as he held up the syringe.

"If a man does not have any weak cells or organs in his body, he will live the normal span of his body's life, will he not? . . . Of course he will! Now, every man has at least *one* inherited weak or diseased cell or organ in his body.

"Of course he has, though he may not know it! His grandfather may have had an infected liver, and three generations later his grandson has a weak liver at birth. But, if there are no weak cells in a man's body, he cannot hand them down to his children, can he? . . . Of course he can't! And with the serum in this syringe, I am able to kill different cells in the body so that they will not be inherited by innocent offspring! Quite a feat for a man you call mad, eh?"

The crawling figure of Eckhart was closer now. Darrell stared fascinated at the Death Master. Without taking his eyes from the syringe, Letrau reached out and grasped Vira Eckhart by the shoulder, jerked

her to him. He suddenly pulled off the gloves exposing hands that were nothing but long, tapering bones. Letrau held up the girl's spiny fingers, laughed shrilly.

"You see, my serum found this female imperfect. There were weak and short-spanned cells in her arms and hands. Therefore she was as worthless as my ultimate experiment! I need a perfect specimen of woman to be mated with the half-death—one such as I think Rhoda Bennett is! Do you see how perfectly these exposed bones function"—he waggled Vira's skeletal fingers—"though there is no surrounding tissue, veins or muscle? That, too, is the result of my serum. It instills factors of all those life-giving substances into the marrow of the bone! It took me years, working upon nothing but the bodies of snakes to completely perfect this serum. No doubt you encountered some of my experiments on your way up the mountain!"

Letrau threw Vira roughly away from him. Then he twisted back his hideous head and roared with wild laughter.

"I have killed all the weak, diseased cells of these men. Their children shall inherit only their strong, longlived cells. And with a perfect mate my experiment will be complete!"

Darrell let his horrified gaze drop for a moment to Rhoda's white face. Her eyes were seeking his, again desperately trying to impart some message to him. Her eyes seemed to flicker from the upper part of her bodice to his face. Twice she repeated the look. Darrell tried futilely to fathom it.

Then he noticed a slight, unnatural bulge—as though the flimsy bodice had caught upon something she had slipped inside.

Letrau picked up the syringe, and again it hovered over Rhoda's pale throat.

"When," he shrilled, "this serum enters the jugular in Rhoda Bennett's throat, and then I inject it into her spinal column, she will become the loveliest member of the Death Master's half-death!"

Wildly, shrilly, Letrau laughed. Then the hand holding the syringe descended.

Darrell shouted. The gruesome form of David Eckhart had risen weakly to its feet. The man tottered, whimpered. Then he threw himself upon the white figure of the Death Master.

Letrau instantly whirled, his hand streaking to an inside pocket of his surgeon's frock. Vira Eckhart screamed and leaped upon Letrau's back, her spiny hands clawing and scratching, all signs of insanity having disappeared from her eyes.

Her swift movement from behind, coupled with her brother's attack from the front, caught Letrau unprepared. For a moment he resisted the vicious assault, but their combined weight was too much for him. He went down underneath the mêlée of flailing legs and arms, screaming for help as he did so.

The derelicts who had been holding Rhoda to the table, released her and mechanically shuffled to obey the shrill commands of the squirming Death Master. The remainder of the half-dead kept their seats, staring with vacant unconcern at the wild scuffle around the table.

Darrell relaxed his muscles, felt the talons of his guards loosen a little. With a sudden twist of his body, he tried to break away, but the hands had tightened, viselike; he was again helpless in their grasp. He pivoted his head, saw Rhoda jump from the table and streak towards him, one hand fumbling inside the bodice. He saw the figures of the derelicts around the walls begin to stir and whimper excitedly, as their gluttonous eyes clung to her.

They swarmed from their stone seats, growling, to intercept the girl—just as she reached the struggling figure of Darrell. Spiny hands clutched her. She eluded them, sprang away.

The Death Master, with the help of the four derelicts, had managed to shake off the clawing, gouging hands of Vira and David Eckhart. He stumbled to his feet, his hand coming out of his frock grasping a small automatic.

For an instant the man who was David Eckhart tottered weakly, gasping for breath, his frail body trembling convulsively. Then Letrau shot him between the eyes. With a muted whimper, Eckhart sank to the floor, a trickle of red spilling from the hole in his forehead.

Vira Eckhart stared in horror at the body of her dead brother. Then, a ghastly scream tearing from her throat, she flew at the Death Master. Letrau's gun barked again. Vira clutched at her bosom, her eyes gazing in disappointed surprise at the thin wisps of smoke twisting up from the Death Master's gun. She sank moaning to the floor and lay still, a sticky moisture glistening on the front of her simple black dress.

Letrau whirled, saw that the shambling horde was groping after Rhoda. His gun came up again, his small eyes burning with rage.

"Let the girl alone, or I'll shoot down every one of you!" It was the Death Master's voice, but it was no longer shrill and strained. It was a deep, hoarse roar, and sounded as though for the first time Letrau was using his natural, undisguised tone.

As she heard the roaring bellow, Rhoda's head came up, her voice a thin scream of surprise. A scrawny hand reached out. She leaped away, and her arms came up impulsively across her bosom—and Darrell saw that something black was hidden in her

hands.

He remembered the odd way she had resembled a Moslem at prayer, out on the Serpent road. It came to him suddenly why she had been seeking his eyes to give him a message, why her eyes had indicated the slight bulge under the bodice. His gun! She had been hunting for it on the road, had found the flat little .32 caliber automatic—and concealed it under her bodice!

He saw her clutching it tightly, maneuvering to a position to throw it to him.

"Use it, Rhoda!" he called. "Shoot!"

Letrau was fighting his way through the turbulent mob of derelicts, his gun barking wickedly when any one of them refused to move. Three times he shot down members of his own hellish legion. Still they hemmed him in, pressed about the girl.

Rhoda had Darrell's automatic in her hands, trying to fire it. Somehow the safety catch had been snapped and it baffled the girl, while Letrau shot down two more of the gruesome men. Suddenly he was reaching for Rhoda.

Darrell's guards had become immersed in the churning mêlée revolving about them. With a violent wrench, Darrell shook them off, was lunging forward.

"Rhoda!" he shouted. "Throw it here! Throw the gun over their heads!"

Before the Death Master could intervene, the girl had thrown the automatic over outstretched hands that batted at it as it grazed over the reaching fingers. It missed Darrell, clattered to the floor. He bent over, grasped it, releasing the safety as he swung it up in the faces of the half-dead. Spiny arms encircled his body, clamped viselike around his arms.

Letrau had an arm about Rhoda, was dragging her toward the door. His other arm was rigid, gun leveled as he watched for an opening to send a shot into Darrell.

But Darrell had his gun poised too, just waiting for the right moment to fire. He hesitated, afraid to fire and risk hitting Rhoda. He saw Letrau's gunhand jerk out, heard a dull roar as a bullet just grazed his forehead and imbedded itself into the wall.

Then he fired. His aim was perfect. Letrau dropped to the floor with a bullet between his eyes. He was quite dead, and Rhoda was safe. Darrell and she fled through the long corridor and out into the open air. Then they stopped for breath. It was still hard to believe they had escaped from that horrible maniac.

Darrell said, "We'll get to town and send the police out here. They'll hardly believe our story, but once they see what lies within these slimy walls, they'll have to believe it! Then we'll go far away, darling . . . and we'll try to forget this nightmare."

THE END

BLACK MAGIC in a Slinky Gown



MILLIONAIRE RICHARD DELLOY, COLLECTOR OF DEAD SPECIES OF SPIDERS, NEVER REALIZED THAT IN MARRYING AWESOMELY BEAUTIFUL LEONORE BLACK, HE HAD COMPLETED HIS SPIDER COLLECTION IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE! FOR THE SPELL WHICH LEONORE EXERTED OVER MEN WAS STRONGER THAN THE MERE ALLURE OF A CHARMING WOMAN. IT WAS THE DEADLY FASCINATION OF A HUMAN SPIDER, BENT ON DESTROYING HUMAN "FLIES"!

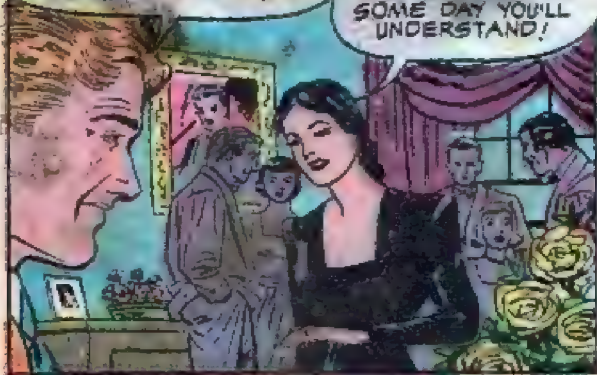
AT THE WEDDING RECEPTION FOLLOWING THE MARRIAGE OF LEONORE BLACK TO RICHARD DELLOY...

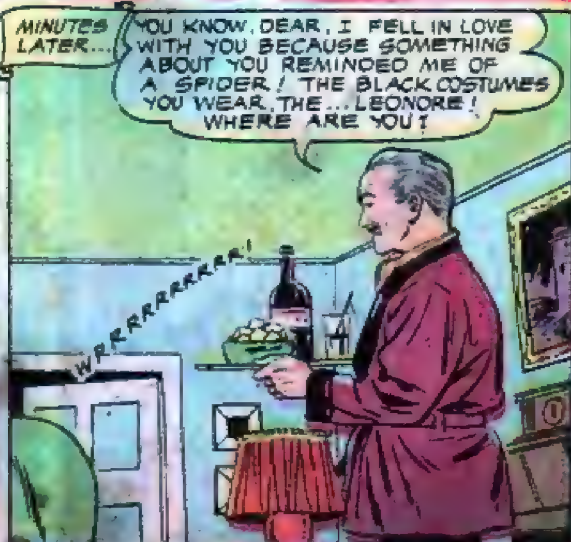
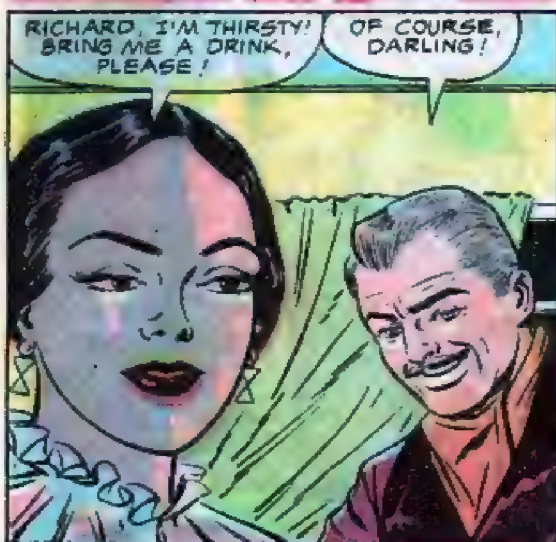
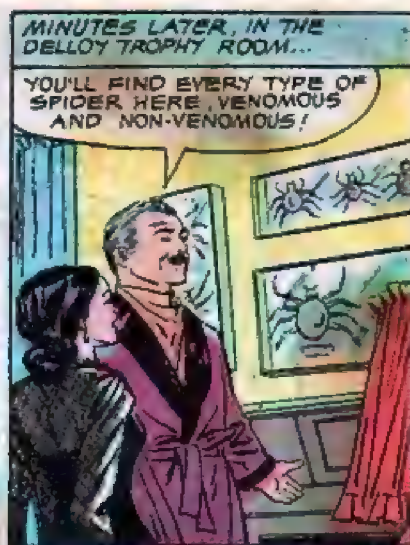
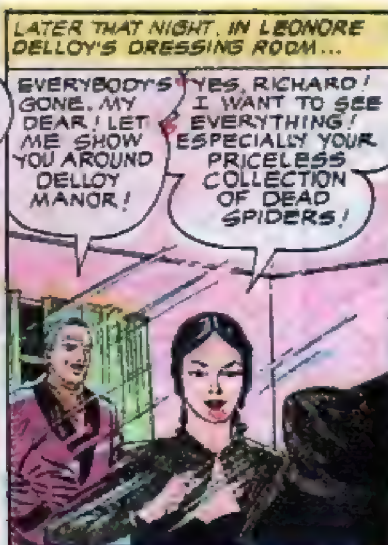
CONGRATULATIONS, LEONORE! YOU'RE BETTER DAN, BECAUSE I GAVE YOU NO WARNING WHEN I BROKE OUR ENGAGEMENT. BUT SOME DAY YOU'LL UNDERSTAND!

I WAS A FOOL TO HAVE THOUGHT MY LOVE FOR YOU COULD COMPETE AGAINST DELLOY'S MILLIONS!

GOOD GRIEF, LEONORE! WHAT DID YOU SEE IN DELLOY? CERTAINLY HIS COLLECTION OF DEAD SPIDERS COULDN'T ATTRACT YOU!

DON'T GIVE UP HOPE! STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN! I MIGHT BECOME A WIDOW SOONER THAN ANYBODY EXPECTS!







NOW I HAVE THE WEALTH TO PURSUE MY LIFE'S MISSION! I'LL KILL ALL THOSE WHO DESTROY MY KIND!



THREE HOURS LATER...

YOU'RE SURE YOU SAW NOTHING, HEARD NOTHING, MRS. DELLOY? THE CORONER NEVER SAW A CASE LIKE THIS!

IT'S AS IF A MAMMOTH BLACK WIDOW SPIDER GOT HIM! THEN THERE'S THESE WISPS OF SILK WEB! IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!



THAT'S FOR YOU POLICE TO DECIDE! NOW YOU MUST EXCUSE ME! I'M QUITE WORN OUT! A MURDER ON MY HONEYMOON NIGHT...

A FEW DAYS LATER, AT A FASHIONABLE OUTDOOR RESTAURANT...

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND YOUR BEING SO INDIFFERENT TO DELLOY'S DEATH! DIDN'T YOU LOVE HIM?

I TOLD YOU, I LOVE ONLY YOU, YOU SOFT-HEARTED FOOL!

GEORGE! LOOK! UNDER THE TABLE! KILL IT!

A SPIDER! I'LL CRUSH IT!

NO! DAN, STOP HIM!



HE KILLED IT! HE SQUASHED IT WITH HIS FOOT! THE MURDERER!

LEONORE! IT'S ONLY A SPIDER!

ONLY A SPIDER? DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE! LET'S VISIT THIS FRIEND YOU'RE ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT! BEN GREENE!



SHORTLY AFTER
IN AN AVIARY...

HELLO, BEN!
MEET LEONORE
DELOY, THE
GIRL I'M GOING
TO MARRY!

WAIT!
WHAT'S HE
FEEDING
THOSE
BIRDS?

SPIDERS!
THIS BIRD
SPECIES
LOVES
SPIDERS!
WHY?

DAN, IF I STAY
HERE ANOTHER
SECOND, I'LL
FAINT! TAKE
ME HOME--
PLEASE!

WHAT'S
THE
MATTER,
DAN?

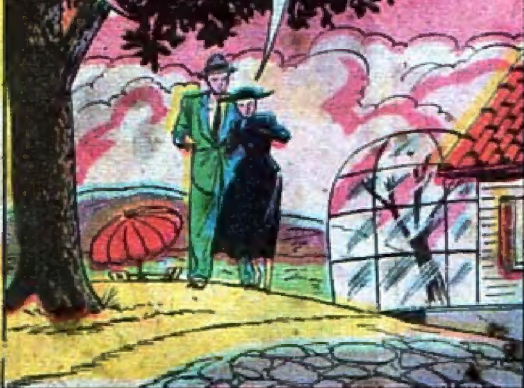
I DON'T KNOW,
BEN! BUT I'M
GOING TO
FIND OUT!



LISTEN,
LEONORE...
WHAT'S
WRONG?

CALL IT "SPIDER FIXATION"! I FEEL SORRY FOR SPIDERS THAT ARE THE PREY OF BIRDS, TOADS, LIZARDS, WASPS, HUMANS!

"I USED TO LOVE TO WATCH A SPIDER SPIN ITS WEB. THEN MY FATHER DIED. MY STEP-FATHER WAS CRUEL TO MY MOTHER AND ME. HE USED TO BEAT US! I USED TO DREAM OF KILLING HIM! THEN ONE DAY THE BEAST GOT HIS JUST DESERTS! A BLACK WIDOW SPIDER!"



I WAS SO HAPPY! IT WAS AS IF MY FRIENDS, THE SPIDERS, HAD HEARD MY PRAYERS! I SPEND HOURS AT THE SPINNING WHEEL!

LET ME TAKE YOU HOME, LEONORE! YOUR HUSBAND'S DEATH HAS UNNERVED YOU!

LATER THAT NIGHT, AT BEN GREENE'S AVIARY...

SHE WOULDN'T LET ME CALL A DOCTOR! OR A PSYCHIATRIST! AND YET I KNOW THAT GIRL IS MENTALLY ILL!

IT'S PROBABLY NOTHING BUT THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF HER HUSBAND'S DEATH! NOW BEAT IT AND LET ME HATCH THIS HUMMING BIRD EGG!

THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN SOMETHING ABNORMAL ABOUT LEONORE! SOMETHING REPULSIVE, AND YET FASCINATING!





